DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 029 566 HE 000 609

By-Hester, James M.

The City and the University.

New York Univ., N.Y.
Pub Date [68]
Note-14p.: Speech given before the San Francisco Planning and Urban Renewal Association, San Francisco, California
EDRS Price MF-$0.25 HC-$0.80
Descriptors-*City Improvement, *Educational Environment, *Higher Education, *Institutional Role, Social Responsibility, Urban Areas, *Urban Universities
Identifiers-*New York University

The old concept of higher education as a period of deliberate separation from the pressures and realities of the world does not appeal to many young people today who want to experience the realities of urban civilization and to learn to master them. The responsibility of today's urban university is to win the allegiance of tomorrow's leaders for making the city a wholesome place to live in and work for. This is the motivation behind current attempts to make New York University (NYU) the prototype of the urban university of the future. With a research orientation that distinguishes it from the traditional US urban university, NYU is becoming more attractive to top-flight scholars and students who will eventually infuse new vitality into the city. NYU's present program places emphasis on providing superior academic facilities, new buildings are designed in a style of architecture that is urban in concept, and dormitory facilities are expanding. For the enrichment of life in the city, NYU trains more professional people than any other university, provides the largest amount of clinical services in medicine and dentistry, organizes conferences and special training programs, conducts research for the benefit of city agencies, business, and industry, operates a continuing education program for more than 10,000 adults, and sponsors concerts, performances, and exhibitions of all kinds. NYU's fundamental task is to be well-balanced, with strong foundations in the basic liberal arts and sciences. (WM)

ED029566

The City and the University

Dr. James M. Hester
President
New York University

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY.

HE 000 609

Remarks given before the San Francisco Planning and Urban Renewal Association, San Francisco, California

The City and the University

The future of our cities is a question of extraordinary concern in many parts of America. The core of our growing metropolitan complexes, the central city, where we continue to build magnificent structures for the conduct of business, communications, and the arts, has become a problem area from which many of our most capable people are alienated. They may use the central city for economic reasons, but few live there and concern themselves deeply with its problems. The result is a defect in our national life that requires vigorous correctives.

Many would agree that the university has become the most potent institution in our civilization. While it is not in and of itself an agency for social action, it is our most effective device for organizing the efforts of people devoted to advancing the conditions of life.

It would appear obvious, therefore, that we should bring the resources of the university to bear upon the problem of the central city. In universities across the country, institutes of urban studies are attempting to do just that, which is, of course, highly desirable. Institutes alone will not, however, in my opinion, solve the problem. A much more dynamic corrective is the proposition you here in San Francisco are considering: building a university in the central city itself.

This is, of course, not a new idea. There have been universities in cities for centuries, particularly the major European universities. In this country as well, for more than a century, we have had what we call the urban university, by which we mean not just a university located in a city but rather a university that seeks to make itself useful to the people and institutions of the city.

While urban universities have grown in number, size, and prestige during the past century, they have not been our most fashionable or prestigious institutions. We have developed an urban civilization despite ourselves. Our predominant prejudices and traditions have continued to favor a collegiate pattern that has little to do with urban civilization. Just as many Americans think that small town life is nobler than big city life, so many of us think that a true university should be located on a broad expanse of land far away from the pressures and noise of the city.

There are, of course, attractions and advantages in the traditional campus setting. I believe the traditional campus will be an important aspect of higher education in this country for many years to come. But I also believe it is time we face up to the world we have created and prepare young people to cope with it. We can do this, I believe, by making the urban university not just a convenient institution for those who commute to it for inexpensive education, but rather an institution of such strong appeal and relevance that it will attract many of the best of our young people and scholars. In other words, we must make the urban university a thoroughly attractive choice for higher education as a means of infusing new vitality into our cities. I am confident that this is such an important requirement of our future that it will be accomplished and that the urban university, rather than being the stepchild of higher education, will become the dominant university of the future.

Not every American city is equipped to build an urban university suitable to the demands of the twenty-first century. Only a few of our metropolitan complexes have preserved or developed central cities of sufficient interest and strength to sustain a university of the first rank. New York City and San Francisco are foremost examples of our best locations for the cosmopolitan, international urban

universities required for the preparation of leaders of the twenty-first century.

Up to now we have not provided adequate alternate choices among colleges and universities to students and faculty who are dissatisfied with the traditional American campus environment. The old concept of higher education as a period of deliberate separation from the pressures and realities of the world does not appeal to many of the young people of today. The urban university has an appeal for a growing number of students and scholars who want to experience the realities of urban civilization and to learn to master them.

Among our young people, in addition to those who seek education in the city, there is an even larger number who are alienated from the central city. They grow up in suburbs, go to college in suburbs or small towns, and eventually live in suburbs. They may commute daily to the central city to make a living, but their hearts lie elsewhere. They seldom develop the interests, tastes, and concerns that lead them to contribute to the enrichment of life in the central city.

I realize I am talking to an audience whose concern refutes this allegation. Your interest in this city is why San Francisco stands out among American cities. Our country needs more men and women like you who appreciate that strong central cities are the seedbeds of civilization and that sick central cities will corrupt our civilization.

We have not provided our young people the institutions and experiences that would encourage the leaders of the future to commit themselves to the city as a place, not only to work in, but also to live in and work for. I believe the new responsibility of the urban university is to win the allegiance of tomorrow's leaders for making the city once more a choice place to live.

This is the motivation behind the present resurgence of New York University. Manhattan Island, as you know, is one of the most inspiring and one of the most discouraging areas in the

world. Not only have we built fine buildings and institutions in New York in the past, we have added even more of them in the past decade than were there before. But surrounding the magnificent office buildings, theatres, museums, and apartments of the rich are acres of slums. The middle class has retreated from the city, both physically and psychologically. It ignores the city and its problems and, to a large degree, the education the city should provide.

New York University is seeking to counter this alienation by providing local students a thoroughly cosmopolitan university experience in their city; by opening up university education in the city to increasing numbers of students from across the country; by strengthening the orientation of the university to the city so that the university will make full use of the teaching and research opportunities that surround it, and so that the university will contribute in turn as fully as possible to the enrichment of life in the city. You may ask, what is new about this? There is a newness to our determination and to our awareness of necessity. There is a newness to the relevance of what we are doing.

The urban universities developed in this country in the last century were not designed to compete with the traditional institutions but rather to meet a need the older institutions ignored. Their founders had various motives, but a major function of urban universities became the education of the sons and daughters of new immigrants, many of them very poor, having to work while attending classes, many having to go to school at night. The attributes of the typical urban university became accessibility, flexible programs, low tuition, and, in many cases, lenient admission standards. Only rarely did they have any sizable number of dormitory students. The student body was largely made up of local high school graduates seeking a college degree in the most convenient and inexpensive way. This kind of urban university was and still is

extremely useful. It has brought forward many of our leading citizens. It has had many deficiencies, however, that must be remedied if the urban university is to train the leaders of the future.

Few, if any, urban universities ever attracted large sources of support. Big endowments have gone to the more traditional and fashionable institutions outside the cities. Large public support has gone to state universities, most of which are not centered in metropolitan areas. As a result, urban universities have been typified by limited physical facilities, comparatively low salaries, and inadequate scholarship funds. The facilities have had to be worked as fully as possible for tuition income, and spaces for faculty research and for the extracurricular aspects of the academic experience have been minimal.

As a result of these limitations, the urban university in this country, except in special cases, has not played the role it might as a means of bringing talent to the city or as a source of vitality and ideas for the city. Exceptions to this generalization are many, however, particularly in such fields as medicine and law, schools of which have often been detached from university centers elsewhere and placed in cities.

New York University has, in many respects, been the classic example of the private urban university. It was founded, in 1831, before there was a public college in New York City, as a means of bringing education to the growing urban population. As a matter of institutional philosophy the University responded to the needs of the city and created schools of medicine, law, engineering, education, business, and public administration and social work, as well as colleges of liberal arts and science. The University was not adequately endowed, and physical facilities were extremely limited, but nonetheless it grew extremely large during the early decades of this century in response to pres-

sure largely from the children of immigrants seeking educational opportunities not fully available to them elsewhere.

In some respects, however, New York University's development has not been typical of that of other urban universities. Partly because it is located in New York City, where there are extraordinary resources for research, the University has developed some departments of unusual international distinction. Perhaps the most notable of these is our department of the history of art, which has developed close physical and professional associations with The Metropolitan Museum of Art. The School of Medicine and College of Dentistry have grown strong using the extraordinary clinical opportunities of a large city. The same is true of law and business administration, of engineering and the sciences, of social work, public administration, and teacher education. A promising School of the Arts reflects the advantages of the University's location in Greenwich Village. Great distinction and service in applied mathematics has been aided by participation of large numbers of students working in industries in the metropolitan area.

The aspect of New York University's present character that distinguishes it most effectively from the traditional American urban university is its research orientation. Not only is the University becoming more useful to the city and the nation, it is also becoming more attractive to top-flight scholars and students for whom the resources of the city, if effectively used for teaching and research, are of immense value.

Against this background we are attempting to make New York University the prototype of the great urban university of the future. We have certain advantages. The orientation to the needs of the city that the University has possessed from its founding makes the University a more relevant and more widely appreciated institution today, when perceptive minds are keenly aware of urban needs, than ever before. The University is experienced in

the logistics of urban education and knows the strengths and weaknesses of its conditions. Location in Washington Square is a strength. It is an easy place to reach by subway and an attractive place for students coming from out of town to live. Both kinds of students are essential. The deficiency in the past has been an inadequate number of students and faculty in residence. The commuting students need a strong, cosmopolitan, continuous environment with which to identify and in which to grow. Otherwise it is very difficult for them to overcome the provincialisms that every community in the world has and that dominate colleges made up entirely of commuters. Faculty members can contribute much more effectively to the academic community and can give much more time to their research if they live near their offices, classrooms, libraries, and laboratories. For these reasons New York University has greatly increased residence halls and faculty apartments in Washington Square in the past few years.

Like most urban universities, faced with high land costs, high operating costs, and small endowments, New York University's physical facilities in the past have been deplorable. Libraries, laboratories, classrooms, and faculty offices have been minimal.

Our present program places major emphasis on providing not just adequate but superior academic facilities. This does not mean that we are trying to duplicate the characteristics of the typical rural or suburban campus in the heart of the city. This is what some universities in cities have sought to do, and what, I suspect, has contributed to cutting them off from the life of the city.

In obtaining land on which to build new buildings, we have taken advantage of Title I Urban Renewal, and we have also purchased several blocks of light manufacturing buildings. We are not, however, using a tremendous amount of land for campus area. We enjoy the advantage of being

adjacent to Washington Square Park, but we are also using a style of architecture, designed by Philip Johnson and Richard Foster, which is particularly urban in concept. The buildings are 150 feet high and as much as 200 feet square. In the case of our library, which has these dimensions and will seat 5,000 readers at one time, a campus is built into the interior of the building, a sky-lighted atrium a hundred feet square, and one hundred and fifty feet high surrounded by balconies that serve as hallways.

It is our belief that the University should move its classrooms and dormitories as close as possible to the resources that make the city attractive to young intellectuals—special libraries, museums, theatres, centers of communication and commerce. This proximity is far more attractive and far more useful in the education of urbanites than a more formidable physical presence in a remote section of the city. The presence of students as regular and active participants in the cultural life of the city encourages a more natural relationship between town and gown than is obtained when students are isolated from other adults within the confines of a university compound.

New York University is expanding its dormitory facilities by purchasing hotels no longer in keen commercial demand on lower Fifth Avenue. In some cases, students and commercial tenants live in the same building. The result is far more mature behavior on the part of the students than that in typical dormitories.

You may complain that we are taking the fun out of college. Yet, the kind of urban university environment I am describing satisfies the tastes and aspirations of a growing number of our best young teachers and students. There is a new maturity among many of them that rejects the traditional pleasures of relaxed campus life and finds a congenial environment in the city, where the action is—in art, in the professions, in business, in the evolution of our society.

You may wonder what effect New York University has on the city itself. We train more professional people for the city than any other university. We provide the largest amount of clinical services in medicine and dentistry in the city. We organize conferences and special training programs for the businesses of the city. We conduct research beneficial to the city agencies and to business and industry. We operate a continuing education program for more than 10,000 adults who are seeking intellectual growth for their own satisfaction. We sponsor a continuous stream of concerts, performances, and exhibitions of all kinds that are part of the pleasure of life in the city.

The residential area around Washington Square Park is enjoying a boom period and is one of the few areas of the city into which the middle class is now moving in great numbers. This may not be directly attributable to the presence of the University, but certainly the existence of the University in Greenwich Village has helped that historic area to preserve its attractiveness. The fact that several thousand students and faculty members live there is part of the attractiveness of the community, just as it is in the many small college towns of this country. It is true that other urban universities have had slums develop around them. I suspect this has been the result of the characteristics of the particular neighborhoods rather than the effect of the universities. In our case, we are located in an interesting, vigorous part of the city, and I believe the University has helped to strengthen those characteristics of the area.

The city is a natural location for many graduate and professional schools that draw readily on the resources of the city. These are the easiest areas in which the urban university can develop distinction, as New York University's history has shown. But if the urban university is to do the job I have described and serve as an agency for invigorating the central city by helping young people to learn to live there and to concern themselves with its vir-

tues and problems, then the urban university must be well balanced and must develop strong foundations in the basic liberal arts and sciences. This is more difficult in the city. But this is the fundamental task in building a university that will attract students and teachers of the highest caliber. This is our major task at New York University today.

The evolution of American cities has followed several patterns during the past three hundred years. Along the eastern seaboard, our forebears first built a series of colonial towns and cities that gradually assumed considerable elegance and urban culture. Wealthy merchants built fine town homes in Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Charleston. Beautiful public buildings and public squares appeared. The new world took pains to build its cities beautifully. William Penn himself designed the plan for Philadelphia.

The dynamic nineteenth century brought rapid city development to America. In the east, the pressures of immigration expanded the small colonial cities and the beginnings of industrialization added factories and workers' housing to old centers of commerce and government. In the middle west and then in the far west, pioneers built brand new towns that became cities at points where trails and rivers intersected, where supplies could be assembled and sold, where local government grew up. Nineteenth-century Americans built cities that reflected the forces at work in the land—the ambitions, the ruthlessness, the aspirations, the materialism, the desire for order, and the diversity that results from competitive enterprises. The new rich built mansions on main streets across the country. Ornate banks, opera houses, churches, hotels, and railroad stations became the marks of pride of every American city. At the same time, cheap dwellings that became slums were built to house the immigrant workers who came to the cities seeking their chance in the new world.

By the end of the century, three separate patterns of life had developed in the United States—patterns with which we are all familiar to some degree. Two patterns, farm life and small town life, were the predominant experiences of most Americans until about the 1920's. Each of us here today can hark back to some farm or small town that we tend to think was the real America where life was simple and good.

City life, at the turn of the century, was the accepted pattern for a significant but smaller proportion of Americans; some very rich, who went to Europe regularly; many middle class, who lived in neat town houses; growing numbers of manual workers, who lived in cold-water flats or simple frame houses on the other side of town.

American cities of the turn of the century were developing a strong urban culture. They built fine schools and school systems, museums, new theatres, libraries, and parks. The city was not so despised, as it is today, as a place to raise children. Until as late as 1940, in fact, the city enjoyed a differential advantage over the suburbs as a place to enjoy the amenities of life. Services of all kinds were better—schools, cultural resources, all the requirements of cultivated life. Then with the improvement of highways and bridges, with shorter working days, Saturdays off, the development of suburban shopping centers, suburban living came to seem more attractive.

The urban culture that developed in this country before the First World War was destroyed by the automobile, the expansion of industry, the depression. The automobile, plus the development of rapid rail and bus transportation, did the fundamental damage by moving the middle classes to the suburbs when the city lost its comparative advantage as a place to live. The absence of much of the middle class from the city, where many of its members make their money, is an underlying cause for the neglect our cities have suffered. Into the houses they left, moved migrants from depressed areas,

and thus began the deterioration of neighborhoods, schools, parks, public buildings. It is not the newcomers that should be blamed for the reversals our cities have suffered. Rather I believe we must blame the automobile, suburbia, the well-heeled lawyer or banker who leaves the city at five and forgets it.

For at least a decade we have been in a new era of city building, an era of public works, urban renewal, designed to eradicate slums and try to provide a sort of sanitized city life for those who must dwell there. By and large these efforts, while impressive to witness, are not very inspiring. They reflect the practical concerns of the professional planner. They often do not suggest sensitivity to the special values of life in the city.

But more recently we have seen evidence of a more perceptive concern about our cities, evidence of a growing awareness that our cities need more than patching up. What seems to be becoming clear to more and more people is that because of the clustering of the vast majority of our population around cities, the central city is inevitably the dominant influence in our civilization, the place where our communications originate, our entertainment is created and performed, our businesses are run. If the central city is not a wholesome place, not only will life for those who live there be degrading, but the diseases of the central city will spread to the suburbs as well.

But if the central city is to be healthy, we must find ways to restore the comparative advantages it once enjoyed. We need to revitalize the strong urban traditions our nation once possessed. It is my conviction that the urban university, properly conceived and properly developed, can play a major role in building a strong urban civilization for the world of the future. I believe the urban university can help significantly in preparing leaders for the twenty-first century.